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SUBJECT: THE OLYMPICS AND NATIONALISM: VIEWS FROM EAST CHINA  
(C-AL8-01964)

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Shanghai, U.S. Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Interlocutors in Shanghai and Nanjing believe rising Chinese nationalism in the months preceding the Olympics was mainly a reaction to Western criticism and "bias" against China during the Tibet crisis. Although China is more confident after a "successful" Olympics, the interlocutors said, most Chinese recognize that China is still a developing country. Several students said their pride during the Olympics was negated by a realization that China still faces myriad domestic problems. The academics uniformly agreed that growing confidence and nationalism in China will not lead to a more "active" foreign policy in the near future. Some scholars argued that the younger generations in the economically developed coastal areas display strong nationalistic tendencies, whereas the sense of a common Chinese identity, let alone Chinese nationalism, is not strong in the countryside and ethnic minority areas. The Chinese Government is trying to promote nationalism and greater appreciation for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through a revision of history textbooks, said one scholar. End summary.

12. (C) Poloff spoke with scholars and students in Shanghai and Nanjing about Chinese nationalism and China's changing attitude towards the world. Academic interlocutors included Liu Litao, Associate Professor at the Nanjing University School of International Relations; Wu Jinan, Senior Fellow at the Shanghai Institute of International Studies (SIIS); Gao Lan, Associate Professor at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS); Hua Tao, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center of Nanjing University; Su Zhiliang, Professor at Shanghai Normal University; Shi Yuehua, Vice Dean of the School of Communication Design at Fudan University; and Tian Zhongqing, Professor at Shanghai Jiaotong University. Poloff also conducted a roundtable discussion with about a dozen graduate students at the Nanjing University School of International Relations.

Tibet: Anti-Western Feelings  
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13. (C) Several interlocutors told Poloff they held negative

views towards the West, particularly the Western media, during the Tibet crisis in March 2008. Rising Chinese nationalism, particularly among Chinese youth, in the months leading up to the Olympics was mainly a response to Western criticism of China's handling of the Tibet crisis, said Hua Tao, Professor at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center of Nanjing University. Many Chinese were caught off guard by the level of Western criticism and were "confused why the West does not recognize China's efforts and only criticizes us," he continued. Shi Yuehua, Vice Dean of the School of Communication Design at Fudan University, said many young Chinese were angry at what they perceived as "unfair" reporting by the U.S. media, and some created an anti-CNN website. Several graduate students at the Nanjing University School of International Relations said they felt "angry" at the Western media's "bias against China" during this period.

#### Olympics Boost Confidence

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14. (C) The generally positive Western media coverage of the Olympics softened much of this negative sentiment, said the academics. Tian Zhongqing, Professor at Jiaotong University, said he personally "did not like CNN" after its coverage of the Tibet crisis but that many Chinese developed a more positive view of Western media after the Olympics. Shi Yuehua similarly stated that the Olympics played a positive role in allowing the West to "get to know China better." Before, the Western media had mostly focused on corruption, human rights, and environmental problems in China, she said, but the Olympics allowed China's more positive side to be showcased.

15. (C) The Olympics had the twofold effect of tempering anti-West sentiment and fueling Chinese pride and confidence, according to the interlocutors. Several students at Nanjing

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University said they felt "very proud" of their country's achievements. Liu Litao of the Nanjing University School of International Relations asserted that China is "more confident now." A self-described strong nationalist, Liu felt the Olympics symbolized China's dominance in the region, asserting during a discussion of regional security issues that "Japan now fears China's rise" and China "can easily overpower" the weapons recently sold by the United States to Taiwan. Hua Tao believes the Olympics encouraged nationalistic feelings, but went on to say that "it is natural for people to exhibit patriotism" during these events, so the nationalism exhibited during the Olympics was "just like in the United States or any other country."

#### Chinese Recognize the Challenges They Face

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16. (C) Although the Chinese are proud of their country's achievements during the Olympics, they are also aware of the country's problems and limitations, the interlocutors stated. Wu Jinan, Senior Fellow at SIIS, said although China is more confident now after a "successful Olympics", most Chinese understand that China is still a developing country with significant domestic problems, such as rising unemployment and increasing income disparity. Gao Lan, Associate Professor at SASS, similarly observed that although the Olympics encouraged nationalistic feelings in China, and the Chinese are proud of their country's rapid economic growth, the Chinese also realize "there is still a long way to go" to become a developed country.

Gao said the younger generation, growing up in the 1990s in relative comfort, witnessed firsthand the rapid rise of their country without any memory of the Cultural Revolution and past hardships, thus imbuing them with greater confidence in their country. This confidence is more pronounced in economically developed areas and is not widespread in the countryside, where people still struggle with day-to-day life, Gao said.

17. (C) Several of the graduate students at Nanjing University said the pride they felt during the Olympics was short-lived. One student expressed mixed feelings, saying she felt proud during the Olympics but quickly realized that "not much has changed" to resolve China's myriad domestic problems. Another student said he does not consider the Olympics a success,

stating that "national pride should not be measured by the number of medals, but should be based on rising living standards. Too many resources were spent on the Olympics...the resources should have been used to raise people's living standards." The other students in the room quietly nodded in agreement, the room falling silent before the outspoken student quickly retracted slightly, adding "Of course, the Olympics were successful in some ways."

#### "Not Aggressive" Nationalism

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¶8. (C) The interlocutors believe China's growing confidence will not immediately translate into a more "active" role on the world stage. Gao Lan of SASS believes that, although China's level of self-confidence is growing, "it will take time for China to adopt a more active foreign policy." The main reason is that Chinese leaders recognize the enormity of problems facing the country, both domestically and internationally. As an example of the Chinese Government's self-reflective mood, Gao mentioned that there will be a conference in Shanghai in December entitled "Duo Nan Xing Bang" ("Trials and Tribulations Regenerate a Nation"), in which Shanghai scholars will discuss and present a report to the Central Government on ways to cope with domestic and international challenges.

¶9. (C) Liu Litao, the nationalistic professor from Nanjing University, said China is not looking to project its power overseas at the moment, citing a Chinese proverb "Fumu zai, bu yuan you" (loosely translated as "While the parents are still alive, do not venture far"). The search for natural resources means China will increase its economic presence overseas, but this is mainly driven by necessity rather than greater confidence or desire to be an "active" global player, he explained. Hua Tao of the Hopkins-Nanjing Center said that although nationalism is growing in China, it is "not aggressive nationalism," meaning that the Chinese are not looking to project its growing influence. Rather, as the Tibet crisis showed, Chinese nationalism is most visible in response to what

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the Chinese people perceive as external threats to their sovereignty and pride, he added.

#### Chinese Identity Versus Local Identity

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¶10. (C) The Chinese Government wants to promote a common "Chinese identity" while preserving minority heritage, said Hua Tao. Although most members of these minority groups will acknowledge that they are Chinese if you ask them about their nationality, their "local identity" often supersedes their national identity, according to Hua. This "local identity" is reinforced by the fact that the Chinese Government classifies citizens as Han Chinese or an ethnic minority in household registries, thus leading to official preferential treatment - and also much social discrimination - he said.

¶11. (C) Hua added that this "local identity" is also strong among Chinese peasants, many of whom are "detached" from the outside world and develop a stronger affiliation with their remote village rather than a common "Chinese identity." He believes their sense of identity depends on whom they talk to: when talking to foreigners, they may call themselves Chinese, but in daily life, they will associate themselves more closely with their local village. For this reason, Hua thinks Chinese nationalism is not particularly strong in the countryside and areas with large ethnic minority populations.

#### Education: Government Push to Emphasize CCP History

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¶12. (C) According to Su Zhiliang, Professor at Shanghai Normal University, the Chinese Government's Ministry of Education is trying to promote nationalism and appreciation for the government by placing greater focus on China's peasant revolution, socialism, and the history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in history textbooks. Su had previously served as chief editor of the highly controversial Shanghai version of the

high school history textbook that was published in 2006. (Note: There are several different versions of history textbooks in China. The Central Government issues a standard version, and most provinces use this or a slightly modified version. The Shanghai version which Su edited in 2006 was deemed very liberal for its emphasis on world civilizations rather than China's revolutionary history and the CCP. Su was consequently criticized heavily by conservative scholars and the Central Government. According to Su, it was bad timing that the textbook's first publication coincided with former Shanghai Party Secretary Chen Liangyu's corruption scandal, since Chen had been a chief proponent of textbook revision. Su mentioned that he was recently asked by the Central Government to edit a new high school textbook again but refused the offer due to "philosophical differences." End note.)

¶13. (C) Su thinks that most academics in China agree with him on the need for a more liberal textbook that takes a broad view of world history rather than a narrow focus on China's recent history. But he says there are some "older, hardheaded" scholars, most in their 70s or older, who prefer more "conservative" presentations of history. According to Su, the Central Government's Ministry of Education is split between conservatives and progressives on this issue, but the conservatives still have the upper hand. Su believes the Central Government is gradually becoming "more open-minded" about the issue but still wants to focus attention on CCP history and the peasant revolution to develop young people's love for the government and their country.

Comment

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¶14. (C) Although the interlocutors did not clarify the meaning of "active" foreign policy or "aggressive" nationalism, their comments were generally in line with Hu Jintao's "peaceful development" mantra. It was clear from these discussions that, though the Olympics lent a temporary boost to Chinese nationalism and confidence, the party was cut short by the realization that China faces some daunting domestic and international challenges. This sentiment was shared by all the interlocutors who, despite the fact that they live in relatively prosperous cities in East China, are less than optimistic about the country's near term prospects, especially in light of the

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recent tide of negative economic news. These discussions indicate that, for many ordinary Chinese here, daily struggles still supersede concerns at the national level.  
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